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## THE BLACK BELT.

THE monograph of Dr. Carl Kelsey on the Negro Farmer<sup>1</sup> is a very important contribution in the study of race conditions in the South. Dr. Kelsey, a native of the Middle West, has been fellow and is now instructor in the University of Pennsylvania. A man of clear insight and sound judgment, he has been encouraged by the General Educational Board to make extensive tours in the South for the study of negro conditions. The present monograph is a result of his study in the field. The guiding motive of the work is the desire for true knowledge and understanding of conditions and the means and prospects of betterment. Like several other men of the North who have recently entered the same field of study, Dr. Kelsey has reached opinions similar to those which the liberal-conservative thinking men of the South have held for decades. He has not arrived at these conclusions through mere acceptance of what other men have said, but through an extensive study of the conditions and their causes.

In the introduction he emphasizes the value of the testimony of the Southern white people, and shows the error of the North in believing the exceptional negro to be identical with the average negro, and particularly in confusing the mulattoes with the mass of negroes of the South; and he states his purpose of describing the condition of the average negro in each of the several sections of his Southern habitat. A prominent contention in the work is that in different parts of the South the negro has differing opportunities for progress; that there is an economic sectionalism in the black belt; that the enervating environment in the Carolina sea-islands, for instance, has retarded and will retard the prog-

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<sup>1</sup>"The Negro Farmer," by Carl Kelsey. Printed and on sale by Jennings & Pye, Chicago, 1903. Price, 50 cents; paper, 103 pages, 25 maps, 9 half-tones.

ress of the negroes there, while the Piedmont offers better influences for them; that furthermore there is a social sectionalism, and in the regions where the blacks are in large degree segregated from the whites they are making little or no advance in civilization or wealth. A thorough study is made of the economic geography of the South as affecting the negro. Gloucester County conditions are treated as typical in the Virginia tide water region; Prince Edward County, in Central Virginia; Beaufort County, for the South Carolina coast; and Lowndes County, Ala., for the inland cotton belt. Attention is given also to the sugar district of Louisiana and the cotton district of the Yazoo delta. Incidental reference is made to the cities and to the pine barrens and the mountainous country where negroes are few.

Dr. Kelsey's emphasis upon the contrast of economic environment as controlling the negro in different ways in the several parts of the South is perhaps a little overdone. His treatment of the several black belts—Eastern Virginia, the Carolina and Georgia coast, the Georgia piedmont, the Alabama prairies, and the Mississippi bottoms—is quite valuable. It easily appears that the negroes in these regions are in an environment very different from that in the North or in the mountains of the South; but the fact remains that wherever there is a black belt, there the habits and conditions of the negroes are of one general description, with but slight variations; wherever the negroes are segregated in masses, there the average negro is in very nearly a stationary state.

The causes of the segregation of the negroes in belts are struggled with, but without much success. The key to the problem is the Plantation System. When the various districts in the South were wrested from the Indians, the slaveholders always selected for occupation the localities especially adapted to the production of the staples. Nonslaveholders also settled in these localities; but after a time a large portion of them were driven out by the competition for the staple market. In "flush times" a livelihood could be made by both planters and farmers in staple production. When lands were fresh, crops good, and prices high, every

one made money in tobacco or cotton, and there was little competition. But when lands began to wear out or crops failed or prices fell below the cost of production, cutthroat competition arose among the producers. The outcome was the survival of the fittest in the staple belts. The possession of managing ability, to diminish the cost of production, or the possession of capital, with which to tide over the depression, was indispensable. The effect of the depressions during the War of 1812 and during the crisis of the Forties was to bankrupt a number of the small farmers and drive them out of staple production. They could not make a livelihood by producing tobacco or rice or sugar or cotton and exchanging it at panic prices for food and manufactures. Many of them accordingly relinquished their relatively high-priced lands in the staple districts and moved to cheap lands in the mountains or in the pine woods, forswore their dependence on markets, and thenceforward produced things to meet their own wants primarily, and dealt but incidentally with salable crops.

The planter could produce cotton, for example, more cheaply than the farmer. He himself had greater skill in agriculture, and his laborers had a cheaper standard of living than their self-directing white competitors. A price for cotton which would ruin a farmer would still enable the planter to produce it without loss. If the price fell still lower, the planter could usually command capital or credit to meet the emergency. As a factory is sometimes run in the face of a moderate loss because it would involve a still greater loss to shut down, so a planter could ill afford to stop raising cotton. He had to feed and clothe and shelter his family and his negroes, and, if possible, pay the interest upon the capital invested. His land and labor and system of control were adapted to nothing so well as to cotton production. In time of depression he could sell neither land nor slaves except at heavy loss; and if he should sell them, his own occupation would be gone, and no other opening was to be found. Therefore the planters and their negroes stayed in the staple belts. Depression was succeeded by

prosperity, and the planters bought more lands and brought in more negroes from the fringes of the staple areas. Thus the Civil War and emancipation found the masses of the negroes in the staple-producing districts, the richest parts of the South; and there they have stayed, partly from inertia and partly because they are better fitted for staple production under supervision than for anything else in America. And there they will stay indefinitely for similar reasons, and because of the avoidance by foreign immigrants of association with the negroes.

Dr. Kelsey, in criticising the U. S. Census of 1900, shows very clearly that the large produce returns from farms cultivated by negroes are due to the negroes' occupancy of the best lands in the South and to their supervision by white directors, and that it by no means indicates that the independent negro farmer is superior in capability to his white competitor.

Such ability as the negro now has Dr. Kelsey attributes mainly to the training school of slavery in the *ante-bellum* South. He errs, as do nearly all writers in the field, in confusing slavery and the plantation system. He means, of course, to say that the plantation was the training school, and that slavery was necessary at the beginning in bringing the negroes into the plantation system. Of present conditions and prospects he writes: "The possibilities of Southern agriculture are great, but the lead must be taken by the whites. The negro has a great advantage over the Italian or other European peasant in that the white man prefers him as a helper. . . . It would be a happy day for the negro if the white woman of the South took her old personal interest in his welfare. . . . The fact [is] that the negro respects and willingly follows the white man, more willingly and more trustingly than he does another negro." This is a very near approach to advocating the reestablishment of a system of plantations with some form of hired labor. Our author praises Tuskegee and similar institutions; but writes, "These industrial schools can never hope to reach more than a certain percentage of the people." He

concludes that if the negro is to bear his proper part in the progress of the country the whites must take an active interest in his guidance. "The negro must work out his own salvation, economic and social." "The outlook is not hopeless if his willingness to work can be so directed that a surplus will result."

The maps showing the distribution of the negroes in the several economic areas are of decided value, as are the statistics of negro family incomes and expenditures and the half-tones illustrating negro life in the rural South. By this monograph, which we trust is merely his first work in the field, Dr. Kelsey establishes himself as an authority upon negro conditions and prospects, and takes rank in the school of investigators which already comprises Dr. Lyman Abbott, of New York; Mr. Bruce and Dr. Barringer, of Virginia; Mr. Tillinghast, of South Carolina; and Mr. Stone, of Mississippi.

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